



**Pacific Women's Parliamentary Partnerships Forum**  
**29 April – 1 May 2015**  
**Outcomes Statement**

Women members of Pacific Parliaments met in Suva, Fiji from 29 April-1 May 2015 to renew friendships and discuss their work as parliamentarians. The Forum's focus in 2015 was on the theme of family violence in the region.

The forum included 63 parliamentarians and participants from 15 jurisdictions including: Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu, Australia and New Zealand.

The Forum was coordinated by the Australian Parliament, with the financial support of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, under the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development initiative. The Forum took place with the invaluable support and gracious hosting by the Hon. Dr Jiko Luveni, Speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji and administrative support from the Parliament's secretariat.

On behalf of the Speaker, Ms Viniana Namosimalua, Secretary-General to the Parliament, welcomed participants to the Forum and introduced the Hon. Rear Admiral J.V. Bainimarama, Prime Minister of the Republic of Fiji, who presented the opening address. The Prime Minister said that family violence is a vitally important issue and a test of values. It is not acceptable and perpetrators should be subject to the full force of the law. The Prime Minister encouraged the Forum to send a strong message to the world that family violence is a matter for public discussion in Pacific society.

The Hon. Maere Tekanene from the Parliament of Kiribati, thanked the Prime Minister and the Speaker for their welcome. Ms Natasha Stott-Despoja AM, Australian Ambassador for Women and Girls responded. She thanked the Prime Minister and the Speaker for their welcome, noting that the World Health Organisation has called family violence an epidemic and that it remains a global and regional challenge. Ms Stott Despoja congratulated Pacific Island parliaments which had legislated to criminalise family violence. She noted, however, that impunity persists, despite the range of legislative and program initiatives around the region in recent years.

Ms Fekitamoeola 'Utoikamanu, former Tongan diplomat and Deputy Director of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, spoke about family violence in the Pacific context, noting that it is one of the 'pervasive indications of gender inequality', and has a direct impact on productivity and a serious, indirect impact, as fear of violence may mean people do not seek access to education. She reported that the economic cost of family violence is considered to be approximately 3% of GDP and that childhood

experience of family violence may be repeated from generation to generation, growing exponentially; legislative measures are often piecemeal; and progress was hampered by the absence of data and monitoring systems to assess measures taken. Legislators needed to be sensitised to the issues so that they can support change. Discussion followed, considering rape in marriage, the role of the church in addressing violence against women, how the media deals with the issue, and the inclusion of family values and life skills as part of the school curriculum.

A plenary session involving Ms Maha Muna of the United Nations Population Fund and Ms Melissa Alvarado from UN Women addressed the issue of data on family violence and the importance of reliable research (including what constitutes violence against women and why data is collected). Ms Muna noted the different types of violence against women and the issues associated with societies with high rates of family violence. Prevalence data needs to be collected to understand the magnitude of the problem—and address it effectively. Ms Muna outlined the methodology used for prevalence studies, and the need for research protocols and guidelines because of the sensitive nature of the collection. The variation of family violence across countries implies that violence against women is not inevitable.

Ms Alvarado addressed the need for more coherent and coordinated responses to family violence across agencies, to reduce duplication, reduce costs and maintain synergies. She reported on the findings of a large study across Asia and the Pacific considering why rape occurs. The data revealed the risk factors and how services and systems need to be modified to improve responses. Prevalence studies have shown that women are afraid of shame and blame, few report violence, and few seek help from service providers. Lack of confidentiality discourages reporting. There is no template response but: violence is preventable, the silence needs to be broken, and survivors need a supportive community.

A panel session on ‘Family violence—legislation and regulation in the region’, chaired by Hon Gatoloaifa’na Amataga Alesana Gidlow from Samoa, involved an outline of international standards and best practice, with parliamentarians outlining the range of legislation and regulation and practices across jurisdictions. Challenges include the content and interpretation of legislation, context, and the resources and will to implement legislation. Gender equality law reform is a long process: it must be sustainable. The impact of drugs and alcohol on family violence was noted.

The role of legislators was considered in the second panel session chaired by Hon Hilda Heine from the Marshall Islands. Six parliamentarians outlined the legislative approach in their jurisdictions, noting the challenges when resources were inadequate to enforce legislation and that the problem of family violence is growing, even in the face of enforcement measures including support for survivors and rehabilitation measures for perpetrators. The focus should be on what is best for the survivors of family violence.

The next panel session chaired by Dr Luveni considered engagement with stakeholders, civil society, churches, NGOs, government, and other parliamentarians, as well as lobbying for resources. The session began with a film demonstrating a Fijian initiative on family violence—a zero violence tolerance program that villages could register for and which required them to undergo lengthy training. Once declared a zero tolerance village, a gatekeeping committee of residents monitored violence in the village. Panel members referred to experiences in their jurisdictions including the importance of:

- Considering the welfare of children before they are born
- Acknowledging that alliances with ‘different’ stakeholders can be highly valuable
- The employment of women
- Bi-lateral relationships with donors

- Developing platforms for election that include addressing family violence
- The use of parliamentary committees and groups
- Being specific in allocating budgets to address family violence
- Questioning budget allocations in parliament
- Promoting gender-sensitive training in parliaments.

In panel sessions four, Chaired by Hon Dr Sharman Stone MP from Australia, parliamentarians considered what happens at the implementation stages of legislation that passes and recognised that although bills addressing family violence are gaining support, implementation of support services and solutions to the underlying problems are falling short. Dr Stone highlighted the need to seek support from the private sector as well as government.

The final panel session considered how parliamentarians can hold governments accountable. Mr Harry Jenkins AO chaired the session and emphasised that it was important for parliamentarians to know more about UN conventions on Human Rights and the obligations that governments have in upholding these. There was discussion of the difficulty that some countries faced in accessing reports regarding measures towards UN treaties and what incentives might help communities to strive toward improvements. Discussion turned to work that cross-party parliamentary committees can do in holding government to account as well as the complexity of the issue and how more work should be done on prevention of the problem rather than just services for the victims.

#### **DRAFT PRIORITIES**

The agreed priorities for Pacific Parliaments are:

##### **SCOPING AND PRIORITISING THE PROBLEM: DATA**

1. Facing the issue and ending the silence. The Forum agreed on the need for research and data that equip legislators to understand the nature and extent of the problem in each jurisdiction, why victims do not seek help or report family violence, and why existing legislative and policy responses are not achieving the targeted outcomes. Adequate collection and analysis of prevalence data provides the basis and authority for allocating resources to address family violence and the practice of shaming and blaming its victims.

##### **ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM: LEGISLATION AND GENDER BUDGETING**

2. Recognising that family violence is a human rights issue and has significant direct and indirect economic, social and cultural impacts on Pacific nations, the Forum agreed on the need to prioritise legislative approaches by auditing the diversity and coherence of legislation and regulations that address family violence, and monitoring their implementation, in order to ensure that it is adequate, comprehensive and effectively resourced (including through the application of gender budgeting mechanisms). The Forum noted that application forms for donor assistance be simplified and more user friendly, and the criteria more flexible and less complex.

### **STREAMLINING RESPONSES: ENGAGING WITH STAKEHOLDERS**

3. Acknowledging that legislators must work with stakeholders to coordinate services dealing with family violence, the Forum agreed that legislators need to identify all relevant stakeholders including church and traditional leaders, NGOs, government agencies and the police, health, education and justice systems. This builds on the agreed PWPP priority in 2014 to develop robust mechanisms and partnerships, and will enable separate and often fragmented resources to be integrated and harnessed to bring about more streamlined services that protect survivors and bring perpetrators to account.

### **OVERCOMING DISCRIMINATORY STEREOTYPES: SENSITISING LEGISLATORS, PUBLIC AND THE MEDIA**

4. Building on the PWPP Forum's agreed priority in 2014: 'developing and implementing a strategy for ongoing gender equality and equity training for all parliamentarians and parliamentary staff', the Forum recognised the need for legislators to receive training to sensitise them to the scope, causes and effects of family violence, and encourage men and women legislators to work together to pursue legislative reform, work effectively with key stakeholders, challenge gender stereotyping in society, especially that of the media, and hold governments to account in complying with international and regional commitments to gender equality.

### **GENDER-SENSITIVE CROSS-PARTY GROUPS**

5. Building on the PWPP Forum's agreed priority in 2014 to create gender-sensitive cross-party parliamentary groups responsible for ensuring that the parliament raises gender equality issues and legislation, the Forum agreed that in each parliament such a body could ensure that awareness of family violence in the Pacific region is raised as a matter of urgency, that the scope of the issue is understood by legislators, and that parliaments encourage sharing of lessons learnt.

### **ADDRESSING CHILDREN'S NEEDS**

6. Remembering that childhood experience of family violence is a risk factor for inter-generational violence, and that children are profoundly affected by family violence, the Forum agreed that participants would urge their education ministers to ensure that the school curricula supports girls and boys by teaching them life skills that build emotional resilience and healthy and respectful family relationships.
7. The Forum urges all Pacific parliaments to engage in actions and work towards the above priorities.

